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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

No. 8 TORONTO October, 1941

ASBESTOS

Canada is the world's most important source of asbestos. A little is mined in northern Ontario, but southeastern Quebec is the principal locality, with Southern Rhodesia and Russia next in order. This mineral has been mined in large quantity for not more than fifty years, because previous to that time there were few uses for it. It has now become one of the essential minerals because of its extensive use for heat insulation, and many millions of dollars worth are consumed every year.

It is a very strange mineral which occurs in threadlike, flexible crystals that can be spun into yarn and woven into cloth for fire-proof suits and mitts. In the Royal Ontario Museum are a pair of mitts knitted by hand and a photograph of a woman carding the asbestos and spinning the yarn on a wheel such as our ancestors used. When one is familiar with this peculiar mineral he can readily believe the story of the lumberjack who threw his snow-covered asbestos socks into the fire, fished them out, and put them on again, astounding his superstitious fellows. They, knowing nothing of this substance, regarded him as some sort of a magician, as the people did the Apostle Paul when he shook the viper from his hand into the fire.

Quebec asbestos occurs in countless veinlets in a dark igneous rock and comprises only about six per cent of the rock mined. The veinlets are from a fraction of an inch to two or three inches in width and, after the rock has been crushed and screened, the fibres of asbestos are separated with a blast of air from a fan.

Those interested in this extraordinary mineral may see in the Museum a large mass of the rock as it comes from the mine, with the veinlets of fibre running all through it. They may also see a model of a mine and a suite of specimens of the many things made from asbestos.

PUBLICATIONS

Among the Museum publications available are; Archaeological postcards, bulletins, pamphlets, and books on Chinese subjects; postcards, illustrating British History and the life of the North American Indian; Prehistoric landscapes and geological time chart; Zoological leaflets, bulletins, handbooks, and bird pictures.

VISITING HOURS AT MUSEUM

Week days except Monday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Sundays 2 p.m. - 5 p.m.
Closed all day Monday.

The Basenji, a dog that "yodels"

One might suppose that a dog that "yodels" would have originated in the Alps, but no, it comes from Africa. The Royal Ontario Museum has added to its permanent exhibit of dog types, a Basenji, an ancient breed, but one of the rarest in Canada. This native of the Belgian Congo and the Sudan is also known as the Niam-Niam (pronounced Yum-Yum).

Mr. K. Nielsen, sculptor-taxidermist of the Museum who prepared the Basenji for exhibition, says, "This splendid example of the Basenji was presented by the Dr. A. R. B. Richmond kennels of Aurora, Ontario. It stands about twenty inches high at the shoulders, has a smooth, short, yellow coat and, though muscular in build, it is elegant and graceful. Heavy wrinkles on the face give the animal an amusing worried appearance. Basenjis do not bark, as do ordinary dogs, but make a peculiar sound described as a 'yodel'."

More than one hundred breeds of dogs have been selectively developed by man in various parts of the world. The Museum hopes eventually to possess good examples of the major types. Already the exhibit contains many famous dogs -- show champions and rarities.

Mummies can tell you a lot

The visitors who daily flock to see the mummies of Egypt are thrilled with this attempt to perpetuate physical life by means of elaborate embalming processes, an attempt which is several thousand years old and which has never occurred elsewhere. From such preoccupation with the affairs of the tomb one might suppose that the Egyptians brooded always on death. On the contrary, study of the mummies and of the tomb objects with them shows that the Egyptians enjoyed life to the full. By means of mummification, charms, and ritual they hoped merely to continue all physical pleasure after death; and that their enjoyment of life was very keen is shown by the Museum's collection of Egyptian arts and crafts.

The shrivelled corpse of a prehistoric Egyptian, ancestor of the mummies, is displayed with them. He was buried more than 5000 years ago in a pit grave on the edge of the desert, where the hot, dry sand partially preserved his body. Nature thus suggested to the early Egyptians the idea of physical immortality; and when advancing civilization evolved the stone tomb they looked for artificial substitutes for the natural preservative. For 2000 years embalming and its accompanying ritual increased in complexity. The collection shows such weird elaborations as jars, in sets of four, for the embalmed internal organs, with covers representing the special guardian gods.